

A Tank to Remember

By John Slee and 1LT David Key



A VINTAGE American tank found in Haiti will soon take its place among other Army antiques at the 1st Armored Division Museum in Baumholder, Germany, thanks to Military Traffic Management Command personnel who moved the rusted vehicle by ship and barge to Baumholder, where it will be completely restored.

In its half-century life, the 1942-era M3A1 Stuart tank has seen service in various countries, according to historians at the U.S. Army Center of Military History in Washington, D.C.

They said the tank — one of 3,427 built — first surfaced at the end of World War II, when it was one of six World War II-era Army tanks sold by a European government to Haiti. The tanks were reconditioned by the Ferrari Motor Company, in Italy, and then shipped across the Atlantic Ocean.

The Army first became aware of the tanks in 1994, when a special forces team, which included museum specialist Jim Speraw, found the inoperable tanks at Camp De Application, a

Haitian Defense Forces installation.

When CMH acquired the tanks for display in Army museums, the M3A1 was moved to an Army depot in Anniston, Ala., and later shipped to the Army Reserve's 88th Regional Support Command at Fort Snelling, Minn.

The M3A1 Stuart is still equipped with its 37mm cannon and original engine and air filters. The only missing part is the cannon's breech block.

MTMC's Netherlands-based 838th Transportation Battalion unloaded the tank from the USNS *Faust* at Antwerp, Belgium. Then MTMC's Rhine River Detachment from Mannheim, Germany, barged the "dinosaur" to Baumholder.

The 37th Trans. Bn. later moved it to the nearby 1st Armored Division Museum, where it will be restored to its original 1942 condition before being displayed with some 40 other combat vehicles, said museum director Dan Peterson.

Recovery of the tank has created a sensation among military vehicle enthusiasts, he said.

"Classic military vehicle clubs are very interested in this tank because it's the first one to arrive in Europe in its original configuration," said John Slee, chief of the battalion's traffic-management division.

Records indicate that almost two-thirds of the Stuart tanks produced went to America's allies through the Lend-Lease program. Recipients included both Britain and China. The rest went to the U.S. Army.

The most notable use of the tank was in the North African campaign, beginning in November 1942. This was the first tank to be used in combat there by the 1st Armored Div.

The M3 was successfully used to defeat a larger force of Vichy French Renault tanks at Oran, Algeria. Later, the tank was used with success against weaker Italian armor, the historians said.

With only a 37mm main gun and relatively light armor, the tank was no match for the armor of Field Marshall Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps. So the mission of the Stuart tanks was reduced to reconnaissance and infiltration. In this new role, the tank's low weight and high speed gave it a decided advantage.

In 1942 an improved version, boasting sloping armor, was developed. It was designated the M3A3 and was nearly the same as the next version, the M5. All of these tanks were named after the famous Confederate cavalry leader J.E.B. Stuart.

The entire Stuart series of light tanks was replaced in 1944 by the M24 General Chaffee tank.

Speraw said CMH is interested in other vehicles and equipment from World War II, including Sherman tanks, half-tracks and armored cars. Anyone with information about possible procurement of World War II materiel may call Speraw at (202) 685-2464. □

Additional information on the 1st Armored Division Museum is available at www.baumholder.army.mil/museum/museum.htm



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MTMC contractor Thierry van Zandbergen checks shipment documents upon the M3A1's arrival in Belgium. The tank is one of 3,427 examples built.

Karel Philippe (both)